



Master of Arts (Sport Studies)

An Analysis of Broadcasting and Attendance in the Australian Football Industry

Hunter Fujak

November 2012

Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Grubbe J. H.

Acknowledgments

The submission of this Masters Thesis marks the completion of the seventh year of near continuous study at the University of Technology, Sydney. During this time, I have accumulated a debt of gratitude to many individuals, which, similarly to my HECS, I could spend a lifetime repaying. I take this opportunity to briefly recognise and thank those most important to me and those who offered the greatest direct and indirect contributions to the completion of this project.

Firstly and most importantly, thanks to my principal supervisor, Stephen Frawley. Your encouragement during my undergraduate study was the catalyst that led to this opportunity. Furthermore, your commitment to the project was critical to its establishment, thus affording me the knowledge and experiences that have unfolded over the last three years. You have been incredibly supportive and flexible, despite constant change within the project, and for this I am truly grateful. A deep expression of gratitude must also go to fellow UTS staff: Simon Darcy, Aaron Coutts, Daryl Adair and Daniel Lock for their support and wisdom during the establishment phase of the project. Also, a large debt of gratitude goes to Tara Mathey for her editing services on this thesis.

To Mum and Dad, you have been pillars of support during the periods when study was most frustrating and completion most distant. Thank you for your patience over the last three years, when study priorities have often superseded family priorities. Apologies to Mum for the countless hours spent having to review early edits based more on ramblings than coherent sentences.

Thanks to Jess and friends on both sides of the globe (Nathan, Danesh, Will, Kara, Bourani, Desirae, Katherine, Katrina and Linda) for putting up with me despite my hermit ways for large periods over the last three years. Some of you have provided incredible encouragement, others inspiration and the rest distraction; I realise that each of these things has been invaluable to me upon reaching this goal and reflecting on the last three years.

Finally, thanks to the NRL and Repucom International for your most generous cooperation, which has allowed the project to occur. In particular, thanks to Lynne Anderson, Shane Mattiske and Nitin Goel for your openness and availability. My personal measure of success will be the degree to which this paper might provide insight to such great sport practitioners.

Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship	i
Acknowledgments	ii
List of Figures.....	v
Glossary of Terms.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Purpose of the Study	3
1.4 Research Justification.....	4
1.5 Limitation and Delimitations of Scope.....	5
1.6 Thesis Structure	6
1.7 Summary	6
2 Literature Review	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Historical and Future Development of Sport Broadcasting	8
2.3 Financial and Legal Elements	8
2.4 Relationship with Attendance	11
2.5 Nature of Sport Broadcasting and Strategic Implications	15
2.6 Summary	22
3 Methodology	23
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 Research Approach	23
3.3 Research Design.....	24
3.4 Validity and Reliability	37
3.5 Limitations and Delimitations of Research Design	38
3.6 Summary	39
4 Results and Discussion.....	40
4.1 Introduction.....	40
4.2 Audience Size and Location.....	40
4.2.1 Total Audience Size	40
4.2.2 Location of Audience	42
4.2.3 Broadcast Coverage.....	48

4.2.4	Implications.....	50
4.3	Audience Demographics	55
4.3.1	Results.....	55
4.3.2	Implications.....	60
4.4	Team Contributions.....	63
4.4.1	Overview.....	63
4.4.2	Home Town Viewership	68
4.4.3	Team Performance	71
4.4.4	Expansion Non-Heartland Clubs	73
4.4.5	Implications.....	78
4.5	Scheduling and Strategy.....	82
4.5.1	Day vs. Night Football	82
4.5.2	Derbies	87
4.5.3	Monday Night Football	92
4.5.4	Audience Comparison and Return on Investment	98
4.6	Chapter Summary	112
5	Conclusions.....	115
5.1	Introduction.....	115
5.2	Thesis Implications and Contributions	115
5.3	Future Research	120
5.4	Conclusion	122
	Bibliography	124
	Appendices	139
	Appendix 1	139
	Appendix 2	140
	Appendix 3	141
	Appendix 4	142
	Appendix 5	143
	Appendix 6	144

List of Figures

Figure 1: Matrix of Literature Findings	15
Figure 2: Organisations and Timeframes.....	25
Figure 3: Organisation Summary	28
Figure 4: The OzTAM Ratings Process (OzTAM, 2010b)	29
Figure 5: Fixtures by Competition and Code	31
Figure 6: Key Descriptor Variables	32
Figure 7: Summary of Television Data	33
Figure 8: Oz/Regional TAM vs. ABS Population Estimates.....	34
Figure 9: OzTAM Variables Summary	35
Figure 10: Manual Recodes	36
Figure 11: Cumulative Viewership by Code and Season	41
Figure 12: Cumulative Viewership by Region (2007-2011)	42
Figure 13: Subscription Television Viewership by Region (2010-2011)	43
Figure 14: Viewership by Code - Heartland vs. Expansion Territories	44
Figure 15: FTA Audience Contribution by Region	45
Figure 16: Audience Share vs. Population (2010-2011, Premiership Season)	46
Figure 17: FTA Audiences by Sub-Region	47
Figure 18: Total Match Broadcasts by Region (2007-2011, Premiership and Finals)	48
Figure 19: FTA Broadcast Hours by Code.....	49
Figure 20: AFL/NRL FTA Broadcast Penetration (2007-2011).....	50
Figure 21: Average TARP by Market (Regular Season, 2007-2011).....	51
Figure 22: AFL Expansion Market Combined Audience Average (Regular Season)	53
Figure 23: Average Regular Season AFL Premiership Viewership by Region	53
Figure 24: National AFL/NRL Viewership.....	54
Figure 25: Age/Gender Demographics by Code (2010-2011, Premiership Season).....	56
Figure 26: Demographic Variance by Club.....	57
Figure 27: Age/Gender Demographics by Broadcast Medium (Premiership Season)	57
Figure 28: Pay Television Subscribers by Code (Inc. Finals & Representative Fixtures)	58
Figure 29: NRL Demographics by Competition Type (FTA)	60
Figure 30: Gender Ratio by Code and Consumption Method	62
Figure 31: Cumulative Viewership by Club Ranked by FTA Broadcasts Percentage (Reg. Season) ..	64
Figure 32: Regular Season Home Market Broadcast Rate by Team (2007-2011).....	65
Figure 33: Regular Season Potential Audience by Club (2007-2011).....	67
Figure 34: Highest Rating Club per Broadcast Region	68
Figure 35: Average Audience by Club by FTA Region (Reg./Prem. Season Only, 2007-12).....	70
Figure 36: Regular Season Broadcast Slots by Year	72
Figure 37: FTA Coverage vs. Performance by Group (2007-2011)	73
Figure 38: Expansion Non-Heartland Club Performance (2007-2011, Regular Season).....	74
Figure 39: Expansion Club Coverage Type (2010-2011, Regular Season)	75
Figure 40: Expansion Club to League Average Ratio	76
Figure 41: Expansion Club Local Audiences (2007-2011, Regular Season).....	77
Figure 42: Regular Season FTA Coverage vs. Average (2007-2011)	80
Figure 43: FTA Average Audience vs. Broadcast Slots (2007-2011, Regular Season).....	81
Figure 44: Count of Fixture Type by Local Kick-Off Time (Premiership Season)	82
Figure 45: Regular Season Attendance by Club - Day vs. Night	83

Figure 46: NRL Sunday FTA Audiences	86
Figure 47: Code Wide Derby Count	87
Figure 48: Derby Attendance Impact by Club	90
Figure 49: Composition of FTA Broadcasts (Regular Season, 2007-2011)	91
Figure 50: Average Match Attendance by Timeslot (Excluding Public Holidays/Other).....	92
Figure 51: Average Match Attendance- MNF vs. Non-MNF (Regular Season, 2007-2011)	93
Figure 52: Average Subscription Viewership by Timeslot	93
Figure 53: MNF- Average Attendance/Viewership by Club	94
Figure 54: Revenue Implications of MNF	96
Figure 55: MNF Redistribution.....	97
Figure 56: Average Audience by Code	99
Figure 57: Top Rating FTA Matches (2007-2011).....	100
Figure 58: Sport Ranking by Category	102
Figure 59: Broadcast Rights Value (2007-2011).....	103
Figure 60: Broadcast Fee Metrics	104
Figure 61: Viewing Minutes Example	105
Figure 62: AFL vs. NRL Viewing Minutes	105
Figure 63: FTA Rights Fee Evaluation	105
Figure 64: Increase in Subscription Penetration vs. Increase in Average Weekly Income	106
Figure 65: Subscription Television Broadcasts	107
Figure 66: Non-Melbourne Club Coverage.....	108
Figure 67: Average Fortnightly Perth Coverage by Television Type.....	109
Figure 68: Broadcast Distribution by Code (Regular Season, 2007-2011).....	110
Figure 69: Average Subscription Exclusive Games Per Season by Club (2007-2011).....	111

Glossary of Terms

TERM	DESCRIPTION
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics.
AFL	Australia Football League.
A-League	The highest tier of Australasian soccer.
BSkyB	British Sky Broadcasting Group. The largest satellite broadcasting network in the United Kingdom, owned by News Corporation.
CV	Coefficient of variation. A normalised measure of dispersion of a probability distribution.
Derby	A match contested between teams with a strong rivalry.
EPL	English Premier League. The highest tier of professional soccer in the England.
ESL	English Super League. The top tier of English Rugby League.
FTA	Free-to-air television.
MNF	Monday Night Football.
NBA	National Basketball Association. The highest level of professional basketball in North America.
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association. A national American sporting association responsible for the organisation of many United States College and University sporting competitions.
NFL	National Football League. American Gridiron.
NRL	National Rugby League.
NYC	National Youth Competition. The elite development competition of the National Rugby League for participants under twenty years of age.
OzTAM	An Australian audience measurement firm that collects television ratings data across the five mainland capital cities for free-to-air and pay television.
Peplemeter	An OzTAM device installed on television sets to allow the monitoring of viewing habits.
PVR	Personal Video Recording.
Regional TAM	An Australian audience measurement firm that collects television ratings data across the five most populous regional areas of Australia.
SPL	Scottish Premier League. The highest tier of professional soccer in Scotland.
TARP	Target Audience Ratings Point. The average viewing audience for a demographic as expressed as a percentage of the relevant Universe Estimate.

Abstract

This thesis explores the commercial elements of broadcasting and match attendance within the Australian football industry. Existing literature surrounding Australian sport broadcasting was identified as largely conceptual by nature, with a corresponding gap in practical discussion and application. A potential lack of access to appropriate data was identified as accounting for this gap, which was addressed in this thesis through collaboration with the NRL and its research partner, Repucom International. As such, this thesis marks one of the first attempts to utilise an exhaustive quantitative dataset to explore broadcast ratings and attendances in an Australian sport context.

An inductive research approach, utilising a multiple case study design, was adopted to resolve the main research aim and goals. Specifically, the Australian Football League (AFL) and National Rugby League (NRL) formed the central cases of analysis. The sample period spanned five seasons, from 2007 to 2011, and encapsulated a total of 2,297 fixtures. Television ratings data, incorporating an array of geographic and demographic variables, was originally sourced from research firms OzTAM and Regional TAM, while attendance data was created through in-house NRL reconciliation against stadium figures and publicly available information.

Results indicated a demarcation of viewer loyalty to each code based on geographic boundaries, consistent with the existing notion of “the Barassi line”. Both codes were shown to be largely reliant on traditional markets for driving television viewership figures, with little evidence to suggest either code expanded its national reach during the period, despite vastly contrasting broadcast strategies. A gender imbalance in viewership was also identified. However, this was shown to be potentially smaller than the pre-existing academic and societal conception of a stereotypical football audience would suggest. The study also found there to be disparity in the levels of intra-club broadcast coverage in both leagues, which was likely to impact the value of respective club sponsorships. While broadcasters illustrated a preference for specific teams, selections were largely justified on the basis of audience ‘pulling power’, which was shown to vary between clubs in both leagues.

Stemming from the key findings and corresponding discussion, the thesis provided a significant contribution to the literature. The practical, quantitative nature of the research not only advanced existing conceptual research, but also provided a basis from which further research and discussion can be facilitated.